

What Kind Of Grade Are You Getting In Spiritual Math? (John 7:40-44)

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What Kind Of Grade Are You Getting In Spiritual Math?

John 7:40-44

I am a strange person. I've always been very odd and peculiar to folks. Not because I act strange or say strange things. Not because I dress funny or have a crazy hair cut. Many people think that I am strange because I love math. I love it. When I was in college there was nothing more that I would enjoy than to sit down and do a 2 or three page math problem.

Hey kids, you young people, if there is a subject that students ought to do your best in and do well at, it is math. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics publication stated: "Mathematics is the gatekeeper for success. Students who continue to study mathematics develop skills to solve problems, analyze data, and technology – the skills most highly prized by employers today."

In other words, in our day and time, math is a very important subject, and one that students should take very seriously and excel in. How well as student does in math will play a very important part in what career or vocation they will be able to pursue.

Spiritual math is equally important. Much of the secret to spiritual success depends on how well we do in math – spiritual math. I am sure you are wondering what I am talking about. I want to point out to you four scenes in the Bible, scenes that have to do with division, multiplication, addition and subtraction. Let's look at these four scenes and check our spiritual grades in math. The first is found in the text we read and it has to do with:

1. SPIRITUAL DIVISION

In our text we read in John 7:43, "So there was a division among the people because of Him." All through John chapter seven we find Jesus as the subject of conversation and the different opinions the people held as to who He was. Notice the scene. First, we see:

A) The Discussion about Jesus - We read in verse 12, "And there was much murmuring among the people concerning Him." The word "murmuring" means they were grumbling among each other about who Jesus was. In verse 12 we read that there were those who said He was a "good man" and others that said, "He deceiveth the people." In verse 40 we find that some said he was a "Prophet," and some that said He was "the Christ."

They had heard His words and seen His works. Some marveled and others were mad. Some were certain as to whom He was and others were confused. They debated and argued about who Jesus was.

I can see them huddled in their little groups discussing what they had heard, what they had seen, and who He was. Everyone had their own opinion.

B) The Division about Jesus - There were different opinions as to who Jesus was. One had their opinion and another had their opinion and the result was a "division among the people." In other words, they were split among themselves as to who Jesus was. There were some who heeded His words and some who hated His words. Some rejected Him and some received Him. There was a division among the people as to who Jesus

was.

Guy King in one of his books tells about a little boy who wrote him a letter and said, "I pray to Jesus now, and I get nine sums right out of ten." I want to say that when it comes to Jesus it is not enough to get nine out of ten correct. You cannot be wrong about Jesus. You have to be right about Him to be right with Him.

I think of two great questions that Jesus asked. The first is found in Matthew 16:13 and it is the question, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" When you listen to what others say about the Lord Jesus you find there is division.

There is a division among men when it comes to whom they say Jesus is. There are those who like Bishop Spong who attack and assault His deity. But there those who, like myself, are on the other side who say that He is the Son of God, co-eternal, co-equal, and co-existence with the Father; the One who was virgin born, lived a virtuous and sinless life as man, died a vicarious death on Calvary's cross, victoriously rose from the dead, and will one day visibly return to this earth.

The second question that I think of that Jesus asked is found in Matthew 22:42 and it is the question, "What think ye of Christ?" Jesus was not asking the disciples what others thought, but what they thought. He was making it personal. Let me make it personal by asking what you think of Christ. Have you received Him as your Saviour, or are you among those who have rejected Him as Saviour?

When it comes to this spiritual division, which side are you on? There is

a "division" and heaven or hell depends on how well you do with spiritual division. The second area of spiritual math that I want to say a word about has to do with:

2. SPIRITUAL MULTIPLICATION

John chapter six gives us a familiar scene in the Bible. It is the story a lad and his lunch. We read in John 6:9, Let's look at this little fellow's lunch for a moment. First, notice with me that it was:

A) A Meager Lunch - It was a lunch that consisted of five barley loaves and two small fishes. This lad had what we would call a sack lunch. The loaves of bread were barley, which was the bread of the poor. When we think of loaves, we should not think of a "loaf of bread" such as we buy at the store. He was not carrying around five loaves of Sunbeam Sandwich Bread. These loaves were no doubt little round loaves. We would say today that he had a few slices of bread. His two small fishes were not much more than sardines, a small pickled fish. It was by any calculation a meager lunch.

This lad's lunch became an issue when the disciples and the Lord Jesus were discussing how to feed the multitude that was gathered. In verse five Jesus asked Philip, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" Philip got out his calculator and came up with conclusion that if they had two hundred pennyworth of bread it would not be enough to for each person to have just a little. A pennyworth (denarius) was a standard day's wages. According to Philip's calculations, it would take more than six months wages to give everyone just a little piece of bread,

and he was not sure that would be enough (Cp. Vs.7).

Then Andrew spoke up and said, "There is a lad here that has five slices of bread and a couple of sardines." But then Philip, rubbing his brow said, "*But what are they among so many?*" (Vs. 9). As far as Philip and Andrew were concerned, there was not much hope that anyone was going to get anything to eat.

Notice in verse six that when Jesus asked how the people could be fed, He was not worried or wondering how it could be done, but taking advantage of the situation to put the faith of the disciples to the test: "*And this He said to prove him: for He Himself know what He would do.*" In one of the disciples first math quiz, they did not do very well. In fact, they got an "F."

Yet, we often fail the same test. When our faith is put to the test we often respond the same way. We say, "I don't know if we can do that or not." "I don't know how we will be able to do it." "In my opinion, it can't be done." Like Philip, we get out our pencils, do a little figuring, scratch our head, figure a little more and then say, "If we did so and so, we might be able to do it, but I have my doubts." Like Andrew, we look at our resources and ability and say, "I'm not so sure about this."

A meager lunch has often been the wet blanket that extinguished the fires of ambition and expectation. A meager lunch has often made a Church or Christian skeptical and doubtful. When confronted with large tasks or big responsibilities, a meager lunch has often turned the spotlight on and exposed a weak faith and our unbelief.

Yet, we must never forget what can happen with a meager lunch in the hands of Jesus. Notice with me secondly, not only a meager lunch, but also:

B) A Multiplied Lunch

We read in verses 10-13, Jesus took the meager lunch of the lad and fed more than 5,000 with it. In fact, they got more than just a little for each person. Verse 12 tells that they were "filled." The word was used to speak of feeding animals with fodder and indicates they ate all they could eat. I am sure that when they got through eating, some were lying back in the grass, rubbing their bellies, and saying, "I can't eat another bite." On top of the people getting all they could eat, but they also gathered twelve baskets of leftovers.

For the disciples whose weak faith was painfully exposed, Jesus taught them that there was no situation He could not handle and no need He could not meet. He taught them what He could do with a meager lunch if it was put in His hands. The lunch was transferred to the hands of Jesus and then transformed by the hands of Jesus. In other words, they learned a valuable lesson in spiritual multiplication.

I believe the story of the feeding of the 5,000 has been given to us that we might learn that if we will give our little lunches to a mighty Lord, He can bless and break it and do wonderful things with it. We may have nothing more than a few slices of bread and a couple of sardines to give to Jesus, but if we will give Him what we have, He will take our little lunch and multiply it and use it to bless others.

You see, the Lord was not only proving the disciples, but He was also proving Himself. It is no problem for Him to feed 5,000 with nothing but a little lunch. What is a problem to us is not a problem to the Lord. What is humanly impossible is divinely possible.

I also believe the story is given that we might examine our faith. Do we look at certain situations and find ourselves wondering how it can be done? Do we get out our calculators and find ourselves shaking our head with doubt and despair? Are we wringing our hands wondering what to do or how to do or if we can do it?

The Bible says of Abraham in Romans 4:19-20, *"And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God."* Are we strong in faith or weak in faith?

How are you doing with your spiritual math? Are you doubtful and fearful? Or have you given your little lunch to Jesus and allowing Him to bless and break it and do wonderful things in you, by you, with you, and through you?

There are many Christians that are happy with just crumbs from the Master's table. That is the reason we have so many crummy Christians. We need to get in on God's work of multiplying! We need to let Him prove Himself in our lives and show what He can do if we will let Him. Are you experiencing spiritual multiplication in your life?

The third area of spiritual math that I want to say a word about is in the area of:

3. SPIRITUAL ADDITION

We read in Matthew 6:33, *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."* In almost identical words, we read in Luke 13:31, *"But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you."*

These words by our Lord were made shortly after He made the statement in Matthew 6:24, *"No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other: or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."*

In this example of spiritual math you have a case of spiritual addition. As you look at this spiritual addition you see two kinds of lives that are being lived. First, we see those:

A) Living for Earthly Things

After speaking of such things as food, fashion, and finance, Jesus said in Matthew 6:32, *"For after these things do the Gentiles seek."* The reference to Gentiles was a way of speaking of those who were not Christians. Jesus was saying that those who were not Christians made the things of this world their passion and pursuit. In other words, they only live for the things of this life and the world, such as making money, having nice things, etc. The word "seek" that is used in describing what the Gentiles live for means, *"To crave and search for."* Jesus was

describing those who live for what they can get and what they can have. It is what they live for and what their life is all about. It is the passion and pursuit of their life.

We have often heard it said that money can't buy happiness, but there are many people that would like the chance to prove it for themselves. There are many that are like the young couple I read about that was having financial problems due to their excessive spending and purchasing things. They sat down and talked about their finances and the wife said, "I think I have it figured out. If we miss two payments on the refrigerator and one payment of the washing machine, we will have enough money for a down payment on a new TV."

These are those who Jesus described in verse 24 serving "mammon." The word "mammon" simply speaks of wealth. Wealth is their master. Obtaining wealth is their mission. Yet, Jesus spoke of a different pursuit and passion in life. He not only spoke of those who are living for the earthly, but also of those:

B) Living for the Eternal

In verse 33 He spoke of those who "seek first the kingdom of God." These are people who are living for another world. They are living for an eternal world. It is not wrong to have wealth and all that wealth can bring into our lives. The Bible does not condemn having things, but it does condemn things having us. The possession of wealth is never condemned. It is the obsession with wealth that is condemned.

It has often been said that we can't take our wealth with us and that is

true. I think of King Tut and the priceless treasures that were found in his tomb when it was discovered in 1922. His tomb was of solid gold. He was found with 15 rings of various sizes on his mummified fingers along with 13 bracelets and assorted amulets and earrings. There were 415 statues of servants complete with baskets and tools to assist him in the afterlife. All the wealth that was put in the tomb was put there so he could take it with him to the next life. Yet when Howard Carter discovered his tomb it was all where it had been left. The young king had not been able to carry one thing with him.

All that we have in this life, all we accumulate, will all be left behind. Only what has been done for the kingdom of God will await us and will last. As the poet wrote: "Only one life to live and twill soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last."

The promise we are given in Matthew 6:33 is that if we live for the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all these things shall be "added" unto us. The word "added" means, "to place additionally." If we live for the eternal, Jesus told us that all we worry about and work for will be added to all the joys, blessings, and rewards we receive from serving God.

What are you living for? Are you living for the eternal or the earthly? Are you living for that which will pass away or for that which will last for eternity?

The final case of spiritual math that I want you to see and that concerns the matter of:

4. SPIRITUAL SUBTRACTION

We read in John 6:66, *"From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him."* As we see the disciples going back we have a case of spiritual subtraction. As we think of these disciples going back we think first of all of the matter of:

A) Following Jesus

The word "disciple" speaks of "a learner." It describes someone that is a pupil of a teacher or a follower of someone. The disciples referred to here are not the 12 disciples such as Peter James John and Matthew, but others that had began following the Lord Jesus.

There had been a moment when they had met Jesus. They had heard Him and received Him for who He claimed to be. They made the decision to receive Him and then follow Him. It is possible they had heard the same words from the lips of Jesus that Philip had heard in John 1:43, *"Follow me"*. It is possible that they had heard Jesus say in Luke 9:23, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me"*

They no doubt heard the same words that we hear from Jesus today, *"Follow me."* The question that is before each of us today is, have we accepted Jesus Christ as our Saviour and if so, are you actively following Him as Lord and Master?

I read a story of a young woman who wanted to go to college, but her heart sank when she read the question on the application blank that

asked, "Are you a leader?" Being both honest and conscientious, she wrote, "No," and returned the application, expecting the worst. To her surprise, she received this letter from the college: "Dear Applicant: A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that they have at least one follower."

The Lord Jesus wants followers! Those that will serve Him, obey Him, and do His will. Are you a follower? Secondly, this case reminds us of:

B) Forsaking Jesus

The Bible tells us that many of these disciples "went back" and "walked no more with Him." The words "went back" means to "drop to the rear." As we would say, they dropped out of sight. To put it very simply, they quit following Jesus. They forsook and deserted Him.

I think of Demas. We find Paul saying in 2 Timothy 4:10, "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." The word "leave" is made up of two Greek words and when put together mean, "to leave down in." It is a picture of leaving a man down in a pit. It means the same when we speak of someone letting us down. Demas let Paul down, and in so doing, let the Lord down, for he was forsaking the work of God that Paul was doing.

Why? His affections were set on things below rather than on things above. The world around him appealed more to Him than the things of God. There are many who say they love the Lord, but yet have great interest in this world. That was the problem with Demas and the reason

he forsook Paul and the Lord. Maybe that was the problem behind the many disciples that went back. It may have been a case where they felt the cost of following Jesus was too great. Whatever the reason, they went back and no longer walked with Him.

It may be there some of you that once lived for the Lord. There was a time when you accepted Jesus Christ as your Saviour. You began to live for Him and serve Him. But then somewhere and for some reason you "went back." Now you no longer walk with the Lord and live for Him.

Maybe you are like the prodigal son. You have left the father. If so, then I encourage you to do what the prodigal son did and come home. When it comes to spiritual math you want to be right in your division and excel in addition and multiplication. You certainly don't want to excel in subtraction.

How are you doing in spiritual math? How 'bout division? Multiplication? Addition? What about subtraction? What kind of grades are you getting in spiritual math?